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19 March 1960



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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DAILY BRIEF

I. THE COMMUNIST BLOC

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II. ASIA-AFRICA

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OK Iran: At the insistence of the Shah, the Iranian Majlis on 15 March passed a controversial land-reform bill by an overwhelming majority. The attempt by landowners to use threats of opposition by the Shiite clergy to block passage of the law apparently backfired, although the law was revised to take care of religious objections. The Shah expects implementation of the law will be slow, and passage of the bill will add little if anything to the monarchy's urban reformist support at this time. The opposition of the landlords, meanwhile, will continue, and probably will defeat much of the intent of the law unless the government maintains continual pressure and supervision. (Page 2)

25X1

25X1

OK UAR: At least four of the seven new members of the Syrian cabinet appointed yesterday by UAR President Nasir are reported to be supporters of Syrian Interior Minister Sarraj. This suggests that Sarraj's influence with Nasir is still strong. There had been reports that relations between the two had deteriorated.

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25X6

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Shah Forces Passage of New Iranian Land-Reform Bill

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At the insistence of the Shah the Iranian Majlis on 15 March passed a revised land-reform bill by an overwhelming majority. The revisions were made to satisfy the clergy, which objected on religious grounds to any law which would permit taking property without the consent of the owners. Top religious leaders had joined with the landlords in opposing the measure.

The landowners appear to be no better off than under the earlier version of the bill. The present draft places heavy taxes on all lands in excess of maximum authorized holdings. The landlord may retain the land if he pays the taxes, which are well above the annual income per acreage. Heavy punishment up to life imprisonment is provided in case of fraud.

The Shah's regime has outmaneuvered the landlords, but at the same time the position of the religious elements has been enhanced by their demonstrated ability to force changes in proposed legislation. [The Shah has stated that he expects implementation of the bill to be slow because of lack of surveys and other necessary information. He also believes that the bill can be modified whenever deficiencies show up.] The bill may bring early benefits through provisions enabling landlords ultimately to retain larger holdings if in the meantime they make better use of their land.

25X1

Landlord opposition to the reform measure will not cease but will probably be discreet until the extent of implementation becomes clear. There will be many opportunities for circumvention of the new law, and only constant supervision by the government will assure success. The Shah will probably gain little new popular support as a result of this bill until experience shows that its provisions are being enforced by the government.

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Nasir Names New Syrian Cabinet Members

Nasir on 18 March filled six vacancies in the Syrian region cabinet and appointed a seventh man to a new portfolio. The vacancies resulted largely from the resignations late last year of Baathist members who opposed Cairo's handling of Syrian affairs. Four of the seven appointed have been associated with Sarraj, present minister of interior for the region. Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Akram Dayri, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Jadu Izz al-Din, and Minister of Agrarian Reform Ahmad Hunaydi are all former military officers and were members of Sarraj's "Little Revolutionary Command Council" prior to formation of the UAR. Sarraj's secretary general in the Interior Ministry, Yusuf Muzahim, now has been appointed minister of religious endowments.

The appointment of apparently pro-Sarraj ministers suggests that Nasir intends to continue relying on Sarraj and his supporters to execute Cairo's policies in Syria and tends to discredit reports that Nasir was preparing to ease the ambitious interior minister out of power. It seems likely, however, that Nasir will remain somewhat distrustful of Sarraj.

The selection of Husni al-Sawwaf as the new minister of economy was probably based on his excellent qualifications for the position. Thabit al-Aris, minister of culture and guidance, is a long-time member of the Syrian foreign service and, like al-Sawwaf, is generally considered to have a pro-Western outlook.

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